

RESPONSE AND REMARKS

Original Claims 1 through 21 remain in the application; new dependent Claims 22 through 27 have been added; independent claims 1, 8, and 15 have been amended to more particularly define the claimed invention; the punctuation of original Claims 4, 11 and 18 has been amended. Entry of these amendments and reconsideration of the amended application are respectfully requested.

The recent telephone interviews on February 10, 2003 and February 13, 2003 between the Primary Examiner, Mr. Kenneth R. Rice, and attorney for Applicant, are gratefully acknowledged with appreciation. During those interviews, the Primary Examiner indicated that an amendment to original independent claims 1, 8 and 15 to more particularly define the claim element "billing option rules" would place the application in condition for allowance. Pursuant to the interviews with the Primary Examiner, entry of the foregoing amendments to independent claims 1, 8 and 15 is requested to more particularly define the phrase "billing option rule" for each carrier to comprise at least one of: an indication of billing options acceptable to the carrier and a pricing rule for one or more billing options.

The disclosed and claimed multi-carrier, multi-service, parcel shipping management system billing option feature solves a problem in dealing with multiple parcel shipping carriers in that each carrier may have different rules for accepting different billing options (also referred to as "payment methods"). In some cases, one or more particular carriers may not accept certain types of billing options (or payment methods). In some cases, even if a particular carrier accepts a particular billing option/payment method, the carrier may charge more, or less, for the use of certain billing options -- for example, a particular carrier may charge more if a user uses a certain type of credit card.

Some systems, such as for example, the shipping kiosk disclosed by the Ramsden reference (Ramsden et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,656,799, "Ramsden") cited by the Examiner, provide a limited choice as to payment methods. For example, the Ramsden reference discloses that "[d]ifferent types of credit or debit cards as well as cash are suitable for payment . . ." (Ramsden, col. 27, lines 16-18).

As discussed in the above-acknowledged telephone interviews, there is no disclosure in Ramsden that the Ramsden kiosk supports payment methods other than those that are accepted by all carriers that subscribe to use of the Ramsden kiosk. There is no disclosure in Ramsden, or in the other cited reference (Roach et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,310,997, "Roach"), that the choice of payment methods offered by the referenced systems include payment methods that are treated differently by one or more of a plurality of carriers. For example, Ramsden does not disclose the ability to accept as input a payment method that will not be accepted by one or more carriers. The U-Ship Credit Card User test in step 812 of FIG. 22a of the Ramsden patent cited by the Examiner during one of the telephone interviews does not disclose different treatment by one or more carriers. Rather, as disclosed in the specification of the Ramsden patent (col. 27, lines 33-60), entry of a "vendor issued credit card" causes the display of names of recent recipients to whom the particular customer sent packages using the Ramsden system. Ramsden col. 27, lines 33-40. Further, Ramsden does not disclose the ability to differentiate parcel shipment pricing according to the billing option rules for different carriers.

The claims of the present application are patentable over the cited references because, as distinguished from the cited Ramsden and Roach references, the present invention provides the capability to present as billing method preference options for selection or input by a user a number of billing methods, some of which are acceptable to one or more carriers, and some of which are not acceptable to one or more carriers. (see the present application, e.g., page 56, lines 5 through 27 and FIGS. 36b and 36c). Specifically, original claims 1, 8 and 15 (as amended) are patentable over the cited references because, as distinguished from the cited Ramsden and Roach references, each of original Claims 1, 8 and 15 of the present invention applies each carrier's billing option rules to each user's preferred billing (payment method) option wherein the "billing option rules" for each carrier comprise at least one of: an indication of billing options acceptable to the carrier and a pricing rule for one or more billing options.

For the foregoing reasons, because original Claims 1, 8 and 15 (as amended) of the present invention are patentable over the cited references, Applicant respectfully submits that added dependent Claims 22 through 27 are also patentable over the cited references.

Original Claims 2, 9 and 16 are patentable over the cited references because each of original claims 2, 9 and 16 provide for identifying each carrier, from a plurality of carriers, that supports a particular billing option preference. As previously mentioned above, the cited references do not disclose the ability to accept as input a payment method that will not be accepted by one or more carriers; the cited references do not disclose any determination or identification of carriers that support certain payment methods.

Original Claims 3, 10 and 17 are patentable over the cited references because each of claims 3, 10 and 17 provide for storing in a database a record corresponding to each user an identifier for the particular user and a billing option preference for that user. The cited references do not disclose storing a billing option preference for each user.

For the foregoing reasons, because original claims 3, 10 and 17 are patentable over the cited references, original dependent Claims 4 through 7, original dependent Claims 11 through 14 and original dependent Claims 18 through 21, which are dependent on original claims 3, 10 and 17 respectively, are patentable over the cited references.

In view of the foregoing amendments, Applicant respectfully submits that the invention disclosed and claimed in the present amended application is not fairly taught by any of the references of record, taken either alone or in combination and that the application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests allowance of the amended application.

Respectfully submitted,

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